

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

Published every Saturday, at No. 204, Market street.—Price \$2 per ann. payable quarterly in advance.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1820.

NO. 22.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

SKETCHES NO. IV.

"The way of transgressors is hard." Proverbs of Solomon.

The Proverbs or aphorisms of Solomon are the result of much learning, great natural abilities, the purest philanthropy, and an extensive knowledge of mankind. They contain rules of life and manners, admirably adapted to every description of men, interspersed with friendly admonitions and sage reflections. They exhibit the collected wisdom of all ages, prior to the time of their royal compiler, superadded to his own, which is said to have been superior to that of any other man, and they have been sanctioned by the united approbation of all succeeding generations. From uniform observation, and from personal experience, for such is the weakness of humanity in its most perfect state, that even Solomon did not exhibit a faultless pattern of virtue, the wise king of Israel asserts with laconic simplicity, that "the way of transgressors is hard." The design of the present number is to attempt, by a few observations, an illustration of this concise, energetic, and demonstrable position.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," considered, in the first place, with respect to its commencement, or, in other words, it is difficult to enter upon the career of vice. "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth the law, for sin is a transgression of the law," says the apostle John. The law here referred to, may be either the positive revealed commands of the creator; or reason, which was given to man for a rule of conduct; or both united. Now, if it be granted, that the design of the Deity in creation was to confer happiness on his creatures, it must likewise be granted, that all laws imposed by the former, upon the latter, will be relative to this great end. This appears still further evident from that

unconquerable desire of happiness, which is implanted in every rational being, as well as from that inseparable connexion between duty and interest, discoverable in the economy of man, which will, hereafter, be more particularly considered. Now as happiness is the ultimate object of every human wish, and as all the laws of the Deity have a *remote* or *immediate* reference to this great object, it must be with the greatest reluctance and difficulty, that a man can resist this fundamental principle of his nature, this innate thirst for felicity, and counteract his own best interest, by deserting the royal standard of rectitude, and enlisting himself under the rebellious banners of vice. Notwithstanding the strength of temptation so often urged in palliation of faults, no man ever commenced a course of criminal conduct without being first obliged to encounter the severest opposition from within himself. The consideration, that for a trifling and momentary gratification he is about to injure his own most essential interest, and to poison that great source of happiness, his peace of mind, and an approving conscience, must throw almost insurmountable obstacles in his way to vice. I might almost venture to assert, that it would be unjust to censure a man for having yielded to temptation in the *first instance*, if he did not, every thing considered, find it more difficult to yield than to resist. It is true that after we have once broken through the barriers of virtue, we can turn aside into the crooked paths of immorality with much greater facility than we could before; for such is the influence of habit upon our minds, that it can render tolerable, and even agreeable, what we once avoided with disgust and horror. But still, so powerful is the moral sense in the human breast, so deformed and hideous is vice on its first appearance, and so directly opposed to every thing, which can conduce to happiness, that "the way of the transgressors," with respect even to

the first entrance upon it, may with much propriety be pronounced "*hard*."

The way of the transgressor, may, in the next place, be termed hard on account of its concomitant inconveniences and pains. Perhaps the wisdom and goodness of the Deity are not more clearly displayed in any of his works or dispensations, than in that intimate and inseparable connexion between moral and physical evil, which is so strikingly apparent in the admirable system of humanity. Almost every deviation from the path of virtue seems to be necessarily attended by its proper punishment. This will more evidently appear from a short survey of some of the vices most prevalent in the world, and the natural calamities, which ever accompany them.

The first example, which I will offer, is *lying*. The man, who has contracted the vile and irrational habit of detailing falsehood, finds a very severe punishment annexed to the infamous practice. He loses that relish for the sweets of truth, which affords to others a constant source of the purest satisfaction. He is deprived of all those opportunities for promoting his interest and happiness, arising from the approbation and esteem of his fellow men, which the man of veracity enjoys. Besides, the man who publishes a falsehood, has undertaken a most arduous task. He must invent a second in support of the first, and a third in support of the second, and so on in an infinite series. Further, when he has once acquired the reputation of a *liar*, should he by accident or design stumble upon the truth, he will not have the good fortune to be believed. He must inevitably forfeit the confidence of his fellow men, his name will be branded with infamy and scorn; he will be banished from the company of all the wise and good; he will expose the feelings of those, who are connected with him, to the severest mortification; and may thank the unmerited bounties of providence, if he does not finally wander a

wretched outcast from society, or even perish in the streets; a frequent and just punishment which this vice brings upon those who practise it. Is not then the way of the transgressor hard.

* * *

TO BE CONTINUED.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

MR. EDITOR,

Having noticed for these several years past that a great and respectable number of the inhabitants of this enlightened city religiously observe the twenty-fifth of December, as the birth day of our Saviour---I have been induced from the above circumstance, to send you a few lines on the origin and history of what is commonly called Christmas-day: if they should tend to convince any of your readers of the impropriety of keeping the day in question, as a religious festival, the end and aim of the writer will be accomplished. Christmas is of popish origin; as the name *Christ-Mass* imports; the *mass* on the twenty-fifth of December, being in honour of Christ. This feast was established by the usurping tyrannical church of Rome, in the fourth century, three hundred and fifty years after the death of Christ. The Christians in the East celebrated the birth and baptism of Christ together, on the sixth of January, and this day was called by them the *Epiphany*, or *manifestation*, as on it the Saviour was manifested to the world; but the Christians of the West, under the authority of the bishop of Rome, confined the celebration of the nativity, to the twenty fifth of December, which is the day now generally observed throughout Christendom. For what reason this particular day was selected it would, at this distance of time, be useless to inquire; and, perhaps, could we discover it, we should find it to be a mere conceit. It is said that the testimony of Chrysostom proves that it was a matter of tradition in his time, that the birth of our Lord took place on the day which is now observed; but in fact the testimony of Chrysostom is against the primitive mode of observing Christmas-day: for he expressly says, when speaking of it, that it *was not quite ten years since he was*

informed of the right day; an acknowledgement which proves that 400 years after the birth of Christ the religious commemoration of the anniversary of it was still a novelty. The birth of Christ has been placed by learned divines, in almost every month of the year. Lightfoot, who is followed by many scholars, makes it fall in September. There is perhaps less evidence for December than for any month whatever. Sir Isaac Newton traces up Christmas to a heathen origin. By the establishment of Julius Cæsar the winter solstice, or shortest day, was fixed to the 25th of December, which the heathens made the nativity of the sun, as it then began to return. Now the Christians applied the observation of the same time to the *sun of righteousness*, and expressions to this purpose occur both in the works of Chrysostom and Ambrose, written about the time they fixed the name of the day. The words of Sir Isaac Newton, are as follow.---“The heathens were delighted with the festivals of their gods, and unwilling to part with those delights; therefore Gregory, to facilitate their conversion, instituted annual festivals to the saints and martyrs. Hence it came to pass, that for exploding the festivals of the heathens, the principal festivals of the Christians, succeeded in their room; as the keeping of Christmas with ever greens, feasting, play, and sports, in the room of the Bacchanalia and Saturnalia. The celebrating of May-day with flowers in the room of the Floralia, &c.!” From the Pagans are also borrowed the *yest dough* or *cake*, a kind of *baby*, or little *image* of paste which came to be considered as an image of the child Jesus---*Christmas candles*---the adorning of churches and houses with evergreens, and the like mummeries; but the Christmas-box, or gift, is probably the invention of the Romish priests. “We are told in the Athenian Oracle (says Bourne) that the Christmas-box, money is derived from hence. The Romish priests had masses said for almost every thing; if a ship went to sea, the priests had a box in her, under the protection of some saint; and for masses, as their cant was, to be said for that saint, &c.” the poor people must put in something into the priest’s box which is not to be opened till the ship returns. The mass

at that time was called Christmas; the box Christmas-box, or money gathered against that time, that masses might be made by the priests to the saints to forgive the people the debaucheries of that time; and from this, servants had the liberty to get *box-money*, that they too might be enabled to pay the priest for his masses, knowing well the truth of the proverb---*No penny no paternoster*---Such seems to be the history of Christmas and its attendant customs and ceremonies. The superstition belonging to this holyday would fill several sheets. Happily the day is becoming every year of less importance. It is not pretended that there is any scriptural authority for the celebration of Christmass. Whether the day shall be religiously kept is left to the discretion of every individual and every Christian society. There are two considerations of some weight in this determination; the first, that the apostle Paul reckoned the observations of religious holydays by the Galatians a proof of his having laboured in vain;* the second, that it is a Christian’s duty to get good and to do good out of season as well as in season, that is, always, by the one or the other, of which a Christian will be swayed according as his desire of improvement and usefulness, or his abhorrence of superstition, is more predominant. Whichever way he inclines, he will however, as a Christian, and as far as he is such in character as well as name, neither forget the birth of Christ nor confine the remembrance of it to a particular day. He will habitually reflect and practically shew that he believes that *to this end was Christ born, and for this cause came he into the world that he might bear witness to the truth*. He will bless God that Christianity is not a bodily service, a religion of times and seasons, meats and drinks, and that the power of Antichrist which strove to make it such, and which persecuted such as resisted the progress of superstition and corruption, has been long on the wane in this happy country. At the same time he will not oppose false religion with irreligion, but with true religion, testifying by the witness of a good life that whilst he is regardless of the day, month or year, he is most

* Gal. iv. 10, 11.

mindful
and in
by his
sterling
sus, he
his Sav
sell mo
of Chri
cepts, a
his exa
tian.

N. B.
ble wit
early in

Dec.

CV

Philadel

Natur
which a
beings,
without
modifie
what he
nal org
which i
ting on
internal
canal, &
ed insti
brain be
the inte
and the
but the
tween
other a
can be c

Our
that the
survive
deprive
we deny
childre
shut ou
but the
must be
place; r
edge ou
that, lik
souls; t

mindful of the design of Christ's birth; and in recommending to the world, by his virtues, the manly maxims, the sterling principles of the religion of Jesus, he best celebrates the nativity of his Saviour. Thus he who makes himself most acquainted with the doctrine of Christ, is most obedient to his precepts, and conforms most faithfully to his example, is, after all, the best Christian.

N. B. If the above piece is compatible with the nature of your work, its early insertion will much oblige yours, &c.

A SUBSCRIBER.

Dec. 20, 1820.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, December 30, 1820.

FEAR OF DEATH.

Nature has subjected man to those laws which are experienced by all organized beings, he is brought into existence without his consent, and, during it, is modified by motives which make him what he is; objects acting on the external organs of sense, produce all that which is called *mind*; and stimuli operating on the nerves, distributed to the internal organs, as the heart, intestinal canal, &c. produce what has been called *instinct*. In the brute creation, the brain being proportionally smaller than the internal organs, the mind is less, and the instinct greater, than in man; but there is no difference in kind between the human mind, and that of other animals; the only distinction that can be drawn, is in degree.

Our pride is apt to lead us to suppose that the souls of other animals cannot survive the death of their body. To deprive the beast of future existence, we deny that they have souls; and like children, in playing "hide and seek," shut our eyes and suppose we are safe; but the light will discover us, and we must be compelled to quit the hiding place; reason will force us to acknowledge our pride and error, and confess that, like the brute creation, we have souls; that in the *codex naturæ*, we have

no better title to a future life. All the hope that man can have is from the volume of Revelation; which, like a star in eternity's ocean, is ushering in that glorious morn when death's conqueror shall call on his ransomed millions to shout in strains of victory; "Glory to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the lamb forever."

It is a certain fact, that, like all the beings which surround us, we are born to die; nature governs us by similar laws, and by her teachings, not one in the great family of man, however brilliant in talents, or majestic in beauty, can be exempted; but must depart—"to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns."

But in this is there aught of cruelty? No, surely no! the great parent of all has thro' life blessed us with happiness; and when the scenes of this world are losing their brightness, when the eye becomes dim, and the ear fails to convey sound, the messenger of mercy announces his approach; the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken at the fountain, and man is called from a scene where he is no longer fitted to act, and the peaceful calm of death affords rest to the weary pilgrim. If there were no other life to hope for, man has no cause to complain, much less to fear.

What then shall we say of those who, possessing the promise of the Almighty God, of a future and a better state of being, fear the approach of the grim tyrant death, and shrink, with a coward's weakness, from a destination of their heavenly Father?

In the Christian Messenger, vol. 1. p. 65, the writer Z. has shewn that the whole family of man will be raised to incorruption and glory; that "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Every one in his own order &c." It will not therefore be necessary to repeat the proofs here; but we will endeavour to shew the cause of men's fearing to die.

Priests, without any foundation in Scripture, have made it their business to instil into early youth, the terrors of an awful hell. As though man was not in the presence of God, in this life, they have told him what pains he must endure in another. Yes, the being, infinite in mercy, has been described as an inexorable despot who reserves his

torments until his victim is eternal and defenceless. The fire with which religious villains* have burned martyrs, has been transferred with accelerated vengeance to a fancy created hell; and the souls of the damned were warned of the vortex of sulphure, the never ending punishment of fire. As a faint type of it the Inquisition has been raised, and innumerable heretics burnt for the glory of God, as a foretaste of that agony which they should feel in the great "*auto di fe*" of hell! and a slight idea of that happiness to the priests, which they should feel hereafter, when from heaven's high arch they should rejoice at the groans of the damned, and sense the incense from their useless cries of mercy! Thus was the fear of death stamped on the minds of the timid, and thus did it alarm those who were of a good and pious disposition; but the daring perpetrator has in all ages laughed at the danger, and preferred running his chance if he could only escape human laws. He was encouraged in this by that absurd doctrine of a death bed repentance, which, like a sponge, is to wipe off all scars. One great proof of penitence was the gift of estates to the church. Terrified by the thought of endless woe, his mind weakened by disease, is it to be wondered at that man agreed to any straw that would save him from sinking; and consent to give riches, which could no longer serve him, for a safe passage to heaven?

In this age of reason, we hear the voice of the clergy, at the death bed of the sinner, crying to him "make your peace with God." How absurd this is! it either implies that God is angry with the sinner, or that he is changeable; whereas it must be evident that if God ever was at enmity with man, he must continue so eternally, for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, without variableness or shadow of turning; and the man who, believing him so, would pray to him to change, must be weak indeed. But, question those who are tied down to creeds, they will cry out *it is cavilling*, and being unable to answer, will brand it with the name of that forbidden fruit called

* Religious villains!—what a paradox? but the writer it is presumed, was at a loss for terms to express such unparalleled cruelty.—ED.

carnal reasoning, which priests in all ages have dreaded, and which will finally consume the homespun dress of self-righteousness which they have thrown over the shoulders of the wealthy and the wicked, for filthy lucre. What then? shall we not prepare to meet God?—not on a death bed; do not will away the money wrung from the widow and the orphan, obtained by legalized robbery from the poor at the expense of their happiness, and think by repenting to cajole Deity? If you would repent, return what you have unjustly obtained, repent towards man, and give up all hope of carrying away merit out of the world with you; for in spite of pride you must know that destitute and naked came you into the world, and naked must you return; ecclesiastical sophistry can make no more than dust, and all its trappings will not evade that mandate “*to dust thou shalt return.*”—If in life you have been wicked, you have received your reward, the punishment for sin is in the earth; therefore if you wish to be prepared for death, be ye always ready, defer it not. Remember that when that frame of mind is attained, which in good actions meets their reward, man is prepared to die; for he has no stigma to leave on his reputation, he wishes no greater reward for doing an action, than the pleasure attendant. Confident that God who is infinitely merciful, will do nothing contrary thereto, he believes that the moment when he is called to leave this state, is the proper one, and is at all times prepared. That being who is impartial and benevolent, brings those whom we call wicked to their end at the best possible time, and it shows weakness and pride in man to suppose that they are worse off than they were before death. The man of reason, should always acknowledge both in the death of the righteous and the sinner, “The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.” If these tenets can be proved false, let it be attempted, if not they must stand as the words of—

TRUTH.

—oo—

A TREATISE ON THE CARNAL MIND.

Continued from page 84.

But to return once more to my main subject: when I say that the devil is

not a real being, *of himself*, I mean only to be understood that he is not a created being; but rather an imaginary being; for I am willing to acknowledge that no created beings are real beings *of themselves*, in a certain sense, that is, they are not *self-existent* beings; for they are all dependent on God for their existence; but yet they are real beings, that is, real creatures of God, for they have received real existence from God, the only *self-existent* Being. But the devil, as such, has no corporeal, no bodily, no real existence; he is only a negative, or deceptive quality, which may be, or rather is, attached to all created, imperfect, finite and rational being but separate from the creature, or being to whom he is attached, he has not even one property of a real being.

I think it very probable that the idea that the devil and evil spirits were real and literal beings, originated in the dark ages of superstition. They may be numbered among the heathen deities; and, to me, one idea is no more absurd than the other.

I cannot concede to the idea of there being more than one eternal source, fountain, or first cause of all things; that is, I cannot admit the idea of there being more than one GOD. And all real beings sprang from HIM: who is a fountain of eternal goodness; possessed of infinite *wisdom, power, and love*. He has made nothing but for wise and good purposes; and, if his *power* be equal to his *wisdom* and *goodness*, every thing must answer the purpose for which it was made. For no one will have the audacity to say, in so many words, that God can be disappointed in the object which he had in view respecting any of his works. But if God has made any thing; as, for instance, if he has made me, for a certain purpose, and I do not answer that purpose agreeably to his design, it is impossible for my weak capacity to see, that, in such a case, God would not be disappointed! But if I answer the end which *Infinite Wisdom* designed, I am sure it must be a wise and glorious end. God will be as well satisfied with the end, as he was with his original design; and, it is presumed, I shall have no reason to complain. But if we are authorized to suppose that God is so flexible in his motives, that he may have two purposes in view, respecting one

and the same object, and that he will be equally glorified in the accomplishment of either of those purposes; so that on the attainment of the one, he relinquishes for ever the idea of obtaining the other; then, I say, we are equally authorized to suppose that God may have had a thousand purposes in view respecting one and the same object, and the event may finally turn out differently from all of them; and God, seeing it has so *happened*, relinquishes all his purposes, and finally sits down satisfied with the event!

I only just glance at these ideas, to put people on thinking. A volume might be written on this subject. We can as well conceive when God began to be God; as when he began to will or design the happiness of his creatures; because we cannot conceive of a time when he could be God, or in other words, when he could be good, and possess any other will or design. It may be said, however, that misery does in fact exist—this we cannot deny,—and why may not the same Being who has suffered misery to exist, notwithstanding his *infinite goodness*, for the same *good reason*, suffer it to continue in existence to all *eternity*? Answer. If it can be proved that there is now, ever has been, or ever will be any misery in the universe, that will not be productive of *good*, then the above objection has some weight in it, otherwise, it has none at all. But the objector may still say, that misery, yea, *endless misery*, may be productive of *good*, in the system, that is, in the universe, although it be of no good to the sufferer! This, however, is begging a question that ought not to be taken for granted unless it can be demonstrated, or proved, by either positive evidence or conclusive arguments.

To be continued.

NOTICE.

A few copies of the first volume of the Christian Messenger, neatly bound, for sale at No. 58 Chesnut street, at 2 dolls. per volume,—where may be also had, Ballou on Atonement, Ballou's Letters, Kneeland's Lectures, Philadelphia Hymn Book, and a variety of pamphlets.

PRINTING

Neatly executed at this Office.